

A
S E R M O N
Preached before the
K I N G,

JANUARY 30. 166^g₉

Being the day of the Execrable Murther
OF
King Charles I.

By *Edward Stillingfleet* D. D.
Rector of *St. Andrews Holborn*, and Chaplain in
Ordinary to His Majesty.

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JUDE V. II.

And perished in the gainsaying of Corah.



Among all the dismal consequences of that fatal day wherein the Honour of our Nation suffered together with our Martyr'd Sovereign, there is none which in this Place we ought to be more concerned for, than the *Dis honour* which was done to *Religion* by it. For if those things which were then acted among us, had been done among the most rude and barbarous Nations, though that had been enough to have made them for ever thought so; yet they might have been imputed to their ignorance in matters of Civility and *Religion*: but when they were committed not only by men who were called *Christians*, but under a pretence of a mighty zeal for their *Religion* too, men will

either think that *Religion* bad which did give encouragement to such actions, or those persons extremely wicked, who could make use of a pretence of it for things so contrary to its nature and design. And on which of these two the blame will fall, may be soon discovered, when we consider that the *Christian Religion*, above all others, hath taken care to preserve the Rights of *Soveraignty*, by giving unto *Caesar* the things that are *Cæsars*, and to make resistance unlawful by declaring that those who are guilty of it shall receive to themselves damnation. But as though bare resistance had been too mean and low a thing for them (notwithstanding what *Christ* and his *Apostles* had said) to shew themselves to be *Christians* of a higher rank than others; they imbrue their hands in the blood of their *Soveraign* for a demonstration of their *Piety*, by the same figure by which they had destroyed mens *Rights* to defend their *Liberties*, and fought against the *King* for preservation of his *Person*. But the actions of such men could not have been so bad as they were; unless their pretences had been so great, for there can be no higher aggravation of a wicked action, than for men to seem to be *Religious* in the doing of it. If the *Devil* himself were to preach sedition to the

Mat. 22. 21.

Rom. 13. 2.

the world, he would never appear otherwise than as an *Angel of Light*: his pretence would be Unity, when he designed the greatest Divisions; and the preservation of Authority, when he laid the seeds of Rebellion. But we might as well imagine that *the God of this world* (as the *Devil* is sometime called) should advance nothing but Peace and Holiness in it, as that *Christianity* should give the least countenance to what is contrary to either of them. Yet the wickedness of men hath been so great upon earth, as to call down Heaven it self to justify their impieties; and when they have found themselves unable to bear the burden of them, they would fain make *Religion* do it.

Such as these we have a description of in this short, but smart Epistle, viz. men who pretended inspirations and impulses for the greatest villanies; who believed it a part of their Saintship to *despise Dominions*; and *speakevil of Dignities*; who thought the *Grace of God* signified very little, unless it served to justify their most wicked actions. These in all probability were the followers of *Simon Magus the Leviathan of the Primitive Church*, who destroyed all the natural differences of good

θεώτοις κακά εἶναι ἢ κακά ὑπάρχουσι. ἀλλὰ φύσει καλὰ (ὡς ἐν τῷ ἔργῳ φάνηται κακόν) τοῖς
ἢ ἀνθρώποις νομίζεται εἶναι φαῦλα. Epirhan. haer. 27. p. 105. ed. Petav.

αἰ· θυν ἀλλὰ διὰ χρίστου· τευξεται τῆς σωτηρίας. *Tucodoret. heret. f. b. l. 1. p. 193.*
 α· Ἡμεῖς ζητεῖν ἐσμέν· οἱ ἀσθῆνοι, οἱ ὅ· ἄλλοι πάντες ὄντες καὶ κύνες· καὶ διὰ τοῦτο
 ὡς καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς τὰς μαργαρίτας ἐμπαροῖν τῶν χοίρων. *Epiph. her. 24. §. 5.*

and evil, ^b and made it lawful for men in case of persecution, to forswear their Religion. The great part of his Doctrine being that his Disciples need not be afraid of the terrors of the Law, for they were free to do what they pleased themselves, because Salvation was not to be expected by good works, but only by the Grace of God: No wonder then, that such as these did turn the Grace of God into lasciviousness: And when it proved dangerous not to do it, would deny their Religion to save themselves. For they had so high opinions of themselves, that they were the only Saints, that as ^dEpiphanius tells us, they thought it the casting Pearls before Swine, to expose themselves to danger before the Heathen Governours; by which they not only discovered what a mighty value they set upon themselves, but what mean and contemptible thoughts they had of that Authority which God had established in the world.

But this they would by no means allow, for they thought all the Governments of the world to be nothing else: but *the contrivance of*

e Ad mili-
tiam ergo
genium,

incedam regem vocat in f. à Deo: sed non à Diabolo, qui nunquam omnino quiescit, immo
quod non ipse quilibet gentis vult in theatris agere. Iren. advers. hæres. l. 5. c. 24.

some

some evil spirits to abridge men of that liberty which God and nature had given them: And this is that speaking evil of Dignities which they are charged with, not only by our Apostle here, but by S. Peter before him. Although the phrase used by S. Peter, ὁ βλάσφημος may be taken 2 Pet. 2. 10.
(by the use of the word βλασφημία in the first of Maccabees) 1 Mac. 2. 6. *not for the bare contempt of Authority, expressed by reviling language, but for an open resistance of it; which the other is so natural an introduction to, that those who think and speak contemptibly of Government, do but want an occasion to manifest that their actions would be as bad as their thoughts and expressions are. And from hence ἀντιλογία here in the words of the Text is made use of to express one of the most remarkable seditions we ever read of, viz. that of Corah and his Company against Moses and Aaron; whose punishment for it did not deter these persons who went under the name of Christians, from joyning in seditious practices to the great dishonour of Christianity, and their own ruine. For therefore the Apostle denounces a Woe against them in the beginning of the verse, and speaks of their ruine as certain as if they had been consumed by fire, or swallowed up by the earth, as Corah*
and

and his accomplices were ; *And they perished in the gainfaying of Corah.* In the verb *ἀπώλοντο*, the *Aorist*, *saith Grotius*, is taken for the future, or present, and so implying that these courses did tend to their misery and ruine, and would unavoidably bring it upon them. If the evidence in history had been clear of the *Carpocratians* joyning with the *Jews* in the famous rebellion of *Barchochebas*, wherein such multitudes of *Christians* as well as *Heathens* were destroyed in *Africa*, *Ægypt*, and other places, and the time of it had agreed with the time of writing this Epistle, I should then have thought that this had been the Rebellion here spoken of ; for all the Actors in it were destroyed by the *Roman Power*, and some of the chief of them made publick examples of Justice for the deterring of others from the like practices. But however this be, we find these persons here charged with a sin of the same nature, with the gainfaying of *Core*, and a judgement of the same nature, as the consequent of the sin ; for they perished in the gainfaying, &c. And therefore we shall consider the words,

1. As relating to the fact of *Corah* and his company.
2. As implying as great displeasure of God under the *Gospel* against the same kind of sin,

as

as he discovered in the immediate destruction of those persons who were then guilty of it.

1. As relating to the fact of *Corah* and his company; and so the words lead us to the handling,

1. The nature of the *Faction* which was raised by them.

2. The Judgement that was inflicted upon them for it.

1. For understanding the nature of the *Faction*, we must enquire into the design that was laid, the persons who were engaged in it, the pretences that were made use of for it.

1. The *design* that was laid for that, and all other circumstances of the story, we must have resort to the account that is given of it, *Numb. 16*. Where we shall find that the bottom of the design was the sharing of the Government among themselves, which it was impossible for them to hope for, as long as *Moses* continued as a *King in Jesurun*, for so he is called, *Deut. 33. 5*. Him therefore they intend to lay aside, but this they knew to be a very difficult task, considering what wonders God had wrought by him in their deliverance out of *Egypt*, what wisdom he had hitherto shewed in the conduct of them, what care for their preservation, what integrity in

the management of his power, what reverence the people did bear towards him, and what solemn vows and promises they had made of obedience to him. But ambitious and factious men are never discouraged by such an appearance of difficulties; for they know they must address themselves to the people, and in the first place persuade them that they manage their interest against the usurpation of their Governours. For by that means they gain upon the peoples affections, who are ready to cry them up presently as the true *Patriots* and defenders of their *Liberties* against the encroachment of *Princes*: and when they have thus insinuated themselves into the good opinion of the people; groundless suspicions, and unreasonable fears and jealousies will pass for arguments and demonstrations. Then they who can invent the most popular lyes against the Government are accounted the men of integrity, and they who most diligently spread the most infamous reports, are the men of honesty, because they are farthest from being *Flatterers* of the *Court*. The people take a strange pride, as well as pleasure, in hearing and telling all the faults of their *Governours*; for in doing so they flatter themselves in thinking they deserve

serve to rule much better than those which do it. And the willingness they have to think so of themselves, makes them misconstrue all the actions of their *Superiours* to the worse sense, and then they find out plots in every thing, upon the people. What ever is done for the necessary maintenance of *Government*, is suspected to be a design meerly to exhaust the people to make them more unable to resist. If good *Laws* be made, these are said by factious men to be only intended for snares for the good people, but others may break them and go unpunished. If *Government* be strict and severe, then it is cruel and tyrannical; if mild and indulgent, then it is remiss and negligent. If *Laws* be executed, then the peoples *Liberties* be oppressed; if not, then it were better not to make *Laws*, than not to see them executed. If there be Wars, the people are undone by Taxes; if there be Peace, they are undone by Plenty. If extraordinary Judgements befall them, then they lament the sins of their *Governours*, and of the Times, and scarce think of their own. If miscarriages happen (as it is impossible alwayes to prevent them) they charge the form of *Government* with them, which all sorts are subject to. Nay, it is sel-

dom that Governours escape with their own faults, the peoples are often laid upon them too. So here, *Numb.* 16. 14. *Moses* is charged with not carrying them into *Canaan*, when it was their own sins which kept them thence. Yea, so partial have the people generally been against their *Rulers*, when swayed by the power of Faction, that this hath made Government very difficult and unpleasing; for what ever the actions of *Princes* are, they are liable to the censures of the people. Their bad actions being more publick, and their good therefore suspected of design; and the wiser Governours are, the more jealous the people are of them. For alwaies the weakest part of mankind are the most suspicious; the less they understand things, the more designs they imagine are laid for them, and the best counsels are the soonest rejected by them. So that the wisest Government can never be secure from the jealousies of the people, and they that will raise a faction against it will never want a party to side with them. For when could we ever have imagined a Government more likely to be free from this, than that which *Moses* had over the people of *Israel*? He being an extraordinary person for all the abilities of Government; one bred up in the
Egyptian

(II)

Egyptian Court, and in no mean degree of honour, being called the Son of *Pharaohs* Daughter, one of great experience in the management of affairs, of great zeal for the good of his Countrey, as appeared by the tenderness of his peoples interest in their deliverance out of *Egypt*; one of great temper and meekness above all the men of the earth; one who took all imaginable care for the good establishment of *Laws* among them; but above all these, one particularly chosen by God for this end, and therefore furnished with all the requisites of a good man, and an excellent *Prince*: Yet for all these things a dangerous sedition is here raised against him, and that upon the common grounds of such things, *viz.* usurpation upon the peoples rights, arbitrary Government, and ill management of affairs; Usurpation upon the peoples rights, *v.* 4. the *Faction* makes a *Remonstrance* asserting the priviledges of the people against *Moses* and *Aaron*; *Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the Congregation are holy every one of them, and the Lord is among them; Wherefore then lift you up your selves above the Congregation of the Lord*: As though they had said, we appear only in behalf of the *Fundamental Liberties* of the people both Civil and

Spiritual ; we only seek to retrench the exorbitances of power, and some late innovations which have been among us ; if you are content to lay aside your power which is so dangerous and offensive to *Gods holy people*, we shall then sit down in quietness ; for alas it is not for our selves that we seek these things (what are we ?) but the *cause of Gods people* is dearer to us than our lives, and we shall willingly sacrifice them in so good a *Cause*. And when *Moses* afterwards sends for the Sons of *Eliab* to come to him, they peremptorily refuse all

V. 12, 13. Messages of Peace, and with their men of the sword mentioned, v. 2. They make votes of non-Addresses, and break off all Treaties with him, and declare these for their reasons, that he did *dominando dominari*, as some render it, exercise an arbitrary and tyrannical power over the people, that he was guilty of breach of the trust committed to him, for he promised to bring them into a Land flowing with Milk and Honey, or give them inheritance of fields and vineyards, but he had not done it, and instead of that only, deceives the people still with fair promises, and so puts out their eyes that they cannot see into the depth of his designs. So that now by the ill management of his Trust, the power was again devolved into the hands

V. 14.

hands of the people, and they ought to take account of his actions. By which we see the design was under very fair and popular pretences to devest *Moses* of his *Government*, and then they doubted not but such zealous *Patriots* as they had shewed themselves, should come to have the greatest share in it; but this which they most aimed at, must appear least in view, and only *Necessity* and *Providence* must seem to cast that upon them, which was the first true motive they had to rebel against *Moses* and *Aaron*.

2. The *Persons* who were engaged in it. At first they were only some discontented *Levites* who murmured against *Moses* and *Aaron*, because they were not preferred to the *Priesthood*, and of these *Corah* was the chief. *R. Solomon* observes, that the reason of *Corah's* discontent, was, that *Elizaphan* the Son of *Uzziel*, of the younger house to *Izhar* from whom *Corah* descended, was preferred before him by *Moses* to be *Prince* over the Sons of *Kobath*: *Corah* being active and busie in his discontents, had the opportunity of drawing in some of the Sons of *Reuben*, for they pitched their tents near each other, both on the South-side of the *Tavernacle* of the *Congregation*; and these were discontented on the account of their *Tribe* having
lost

Num. 3.
30.

Num. 2. 10.
3 29.

lost the privilege of *Primogeniture*. Thus what ever the pretences are, how fair and popular soever in the opposition men make to Authority, ambition and private discontents are the true beginners of them : but these must be covered over with the deepest *disimulation*, with most vehement *Protestations* to the contrary, nothing must be talked of but a mighty zeal for *Religion*, and the publick *Interest*. So *Josephus* tells us concerning *Corah*, that while he carried on his own ambitious designs, with all the arts of sedition and a popular eloquence, insinuating into the peoples minds strange suggestions against *Moses* his Government, as being a meer politick design of his to enslave the people of *God*, and advance his own family and interest, ἐβέβηλεν τῷ κοινῷ προνοήσαντι δὲ καὶ, he would seem to regard nothing but the publick good. If fair pretences, and glorious titles will serve to cheat the people into their own miseries, and the sad effects of Rebellion ; they shall never want those who will enslave them for the sake of *Liberty*, undo them for the publick good, and destroy them with designs of *Reformation*. For nothing is more popular than *Rebellion* in the beginning ; nothing less in the issue of it. And the only true reason that it is ever so, is from the want of wisdom

*Joseph. ant.
t. 7. Jud.
l. 4. c. 2.*

dom and judgement in the generality of mankind, who seldom see to the end of things, and hardly distinguish between the names and nature of them, till their own dear bought experience hath taught them the difference. Sedition is of the nature, and hath the inseparable properties of *Sin*; for it is conceived with pleasure, brought forth with pain, and ends in death and misery. Nothing enters upon the stage with a braver shew and appearance, but however prosperous for a time it may continue, it commonly meets with a fatal end. But it is with this sin as to this world, as it is with others as to the next; men when they are betrayed into them, are carried away and transported with the pleasing temptations, not considering the unspeakable misery that follows after them. So that what the *Devils* advantage is in order to the ruine of mens souls, is the advantage of seditious persons over the less understanding people; they both tempt with an appearance of good; and equally deceive them which hearken to them. But as we still find, that notwithstanding all the grave admonitions, the sober counsels, the rational discourses, the perswasive arguments which are used to deter men from the pra-

vice of sin, they will still be such *Fools* to yield
 to the *Devils* temptations against their own
welfare: So, neither the blessings of a con-
 tinued *Peace*, nor the miseries of an intestine
War, neither the security of a settled *Government*,
 nor the constant danger of *Innovations*
 will hinder men of fiery and restless spirits
 from raising combustions in a Nation, though
 themselves perish in the *Flames* of them. This
 we find here was the case of *Corab* and his
 company; they had forgotten the groans of
 their captivity in *Egypt*, and the miracles of
 their deliverance out of it, and all the faithful
 services of *Moses*, and *Aaron*; they considered
 not the difficulties of *Government*, nor the im-
 possibility of satisfying the ambitious desires
 of all pretenders; they regarded not that
God from whom their power was derived, nor
 the account they must give to him for their
 resistance of it: nothing but a full *Revenge*
 upon the *Government* can satisfy them, by
 leaving no means unattempted for its over-
 throw, though themselves be consumed by
 the fall of it. It were happy for *Government* if
 these turbulent spirits could be singled out
 from the rest in their first attempts; but that
 is the usual subtilty of such men, when they
 find themselves aimed at, they run into the
 common

common herd, and perswade the people that they are equally concerned with themselves in the present danger, that though the pretence be only against faction and sedition, the design is the slavery and oppression of the People. This they manage at first by grave nods, and secret whispers, by deep sighs, and extatick motions, by far fetched discourses, and *Tragical* stories, till they find the people capable of receiving their impressions, and then seem most unwilling to mention that which it was at first their design to discover. By such arts as these *Corah* had prepared, as *Josephus* tells us, almost the whole Camp of *Israel* for a popular tumult, so that they were like to have stoned *Moses* before he was aware of it; and it seems the Faction had gained a mighty interest among the people, when although *God* so severely and remarkably punished the heads of it, yet the very next day all the Congregation of the Children of *Israel* murmured against *Moses* and *Aaron*, saying, *Ye have killed the people of the Lord*. What a mark of *Gods* people was sedition grown among them! When these men were accounted *Saints* in spite of Heaven, and *Martyrs*, though *God* himself destroyed them. They were men who were only sanctified by *Rebellion*.

Joseph. Ant. l. 4. c. 2.

Numb. 16. 41.

lion : and shewed no other fruits of their piety but disobedience to Authority. But the danger had not been so great, how loud soever the complaints had been, if only the ruder multitude had been gained to the Favour of *Corah* and his party : For these wanted heads to manage them, and some Countenance of Authority to appear under ; and for this purpose they had drawn to their Faction 250 Princes of the Assembly, famous in the Congregation, men of Renown, i.e. Members of the great Council of the Nation. Whom *Moses* was wont to call and advise with about the publick Affairs of it ; such who sate in *Comitiis Senatorum*, as *Paul. Fagius* tells us, therefore said to be קריאי מועד such as were called to the great Assembly which sate in Parliament at the door of the Tabernacle of the Congregation, which was the place where they met together. These were the Heads of the Tribes, and the Captains of thousands, and the men of the greatest Fame and Authority among the People whom *Moses* assembled together for advice and counsel, as often as he saw just occasion for it. And as far as I can find were distinct from the great Sanhedrin, which seemed to be rather a constant Court of Judicature which sate to receive Appeals from Inferiour Courts,

V. 2.

Num. 10. 2.

Courts, and to determine such difficult causes which were reserved peculiarly for it, as about the *Apostasy* of a *whole Tribe*, the case of false *Prophets*, and the like. But these 250 men did far exceed the whole *number* of the *Sanhedrin*; and the *Heads* of the *Tribes*, and the *Elders* of *Israel* were summoned together upon any very weighty occasion, by *Moses* both before and after the institution of the *Sanhedrin*. And now since the *Faction* had gained so great strength by the accession of so great a number of the most leading men among the *People*, we may expect they should soon declare their intentions, and publish the grounds of their entering into such a combination against *Moses*.

3. Which is the next thing to be spoken to; viz. the colours and pretences under which these persons sought to justify the proceedings of the *Faction*. Which were these two,

1. *The asserting the Rights and Liberties of the people in opposition to the Government of Moses.*

2. *The freeing themselves from the encroachments upon their spiritual Privileges, which were made by the Usurpations of Aaron and the Priesthood.*

1. *The asserting the Rights and Liberties of the people*

people in opposition to the Government of Moses.

Numb. 16.

13. Is it a small thing, say they, that thou hast brought us up out of a Land that floweth with Milk and Honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a Prince over us? And before, their charge was, that Mo-

v. 3.

ses and Aaron took too much upon them, in lifting up themselves above the Congregation of the Lord. Which Josephus more at large explains, telling us that the great accusation of Moses

Joseph. l. 4.
132.

was, that out of his ambition and affectation of Power, he had taken upon himself the Government of the people without their consent, that he made use of his pretence of Familiarity with God only for a Politick end, that by this means he debarred the people of that Liberty which God had given them, and no man ought to take from them, that they

Συμφορῇ
ἢ πρὸ πλεί-
ον τῶν
τοῦτο
ἐστὶ λαμβά-
νουν ὁνομα-
ζομένην κολα-
ζὴν, ἥ μὴ
παρελθόντων
οἱς δὲ ὑπε-
ρῶν ἐλάσσει-
ται φανε-
ρὸς ἔχειν
πλεονεξίαν.
Joseph.
lib. 4. c. 2.

were all a Free-born people, and equally the Children of Abraham, and therefore there was no reason they should depend upon the will of a single Person, who by his Politick Arts had brought them to the greatest necessities, that he might rule them the better; Wherefore Corah, as though he had been already President of a High-Court of Justice upon Moses their King, determines, that it was necessary for the Common-wealth, that such enemies to the Pub-

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lick Interest should be discovered and punished; lest if they be let alone in their Usurpations of Power, they declare themselves open enemies when it will be too late to oppose them. There were then two great Principles among them by which they thought to defend themselves.

1. That *Liberty* and a right to *Power* is so inherent in the *People*, that it cannot be taken from them.

2. That in case of *Usurpation* upon that *Liberty* of the people, they may resume the exercise of *Power*, by punishing those who are guilty of it.

1. That *Liberty*, and a right to *Power*, is inseparable from the people; *libertatis patrocinium suscipiunt*, saith *Calvin*, upon *Corah* and his company; and I believe they will be found to be the first assertors of this kind of *Liberty* that ever were in the world. And happy had it been for us in this Nation, if *Corah* had never found any Disciples in it. For what a blessed *Liberty* was this which *Corah* aimed at, viz. to change one excellent Prince, as *Moses* was, for 250 Tyrants, besides *Corah* and the Sons of *Reuben*? What just and equal liberty was it which *Moses* did deprive them of? It was only the *Liberty* of destroying themselves, which all the power he had could hardly

hardly keep them from. Could there be any greater *Liberty* than delivering them out of the house of bondage? and was not *Moses* the great Instrument in effecting it? Could there be greater *Liberty* than for their whole Nation to be preserved from all the designs of their enemies, to enjoy their own *Laws*, and matters of *Justice* to be duly administred among them? and had they not all these under the Government of *Moses*? What means then this out-cry for *Liberty*? Is it that they would have had no *Government* at all among them, but that every one might have done what he pleased himself? This indeed were a desirable *Liberty*, if a man could have it alone: but when every one thinks that he is but one, though he be free; and every one else is as free as he, but though their *freedom* be equal to his, his *Power* is not equal to theirs; and therefore to bring things to a more just proportion, every one must part with some power for a great deal of security. If any man can imagine himself in such a *state of confusion*, which some improperly call a *state of nature*; let him consider, whether the contentment he could take in his own liberty and power to defend himself, would ballance the fears he would have of the injury which others

others in the same state might be able to do him. Not that I think meer *fear* made men at first enter into Societies, for there is a natural inclination in mankind to it, and one of the greatest pleasures of humane life lyes in the enjoyment of it. But what other considerations incline men to, *fear* makes reasonable, though men part with some supposed liberty for the enjoyment of it. So that the utmost liberty is destroyed by the very nature of *Government*, and nothing can be more unreasonable than for men to quarrel with *Government* for that, which they cannot enjoy and the preservation of themselves together. Which alone makes the desire of *Power* reasonable, and if the preservation of our selves in our rights and properties may be had without it, all that the want of *Liberty* signifies, is, that men have all the conveniences of *Power* without the trouble and the cares of it. And if this be not a more desirable *Liberty* than the other, let any rational man judge. The pretence of *Liberty* then in this sense against *Government*, is, that men are *Fools* in taking the best care to preserve themselves, that *Laws* are but instruments of *Slavery*, and every single man is better able to defend himself, than the united strength of a people in *Society* is to defend him. And this kind of *Liberty* we

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may

may justly think will be desired by none but mad-men, and beasts of prey. It follows then, that what *Liberty* is inconsistent with all *Government*, must never be pleaded against any one sort of it. But is there then so great a degree of *Liberty* in one mode of *Government* more than another, that it should be thought reasonable to disturb *Government*, meerly to alter the form of it? Would it have been so much better for the people of *Israel* to have been governed by the 250 men here mentioned, than by *Moses*? Would not they have required the same subjection and obedience to themselves, though their commands had been much more unreasonable than his? What security can there be that every one of these shall not be worse in all respects than him whom they were so willing to lay aside; and if one be thought troublesome, what *Liberty* and ease is there when their name is *Legion*? So that the folly of these popular pretences is as great as the sin in being perswaded by them.

And it may be they have not thought amiss who have attributed a great part of that disturbance of the Peace of *Kingdoms*, under a pretence of popular *Government*, to an unjust admiration of those *Greek* and *Roman* Writers, who have unreasonably set up *Liberty* in oppo-

opposition to *Monarchy*. But some of the wisest of them have given us a truer account of these things, and have told us, that it was impossible the *Roman State* could have been preserved longer, unless it had submitted to an *Imperial Power*; For the popular heats and factions were so great, that the annual election of *Magistrates*, was but another name for a tumult; and as *Dio* goes on, the name of popular Government is far more plausible, but the benefits of *Monarchy* are far greater; it being much easier to find one good than many; and though one be accounted difficult, the other is almost impossible. And as he elsewhere well observes, the flourishing of a *Common-wealth* depends upon its poverty; that being alone able to unite the minds of the *Governours*, who in a plentiful state, not set about with enemies, will be grasping at their own private interests, and fall naturally from thence into divisions and animosities; but the flourishing of the *Monarchy* lyes in the riches of it, the *Prince* and the *People* having the same interest, and being rich or poor together. So that we see the notion of *Liberty*, and exercise of power in *Government*, is so far from being an inseparable property of the people, that the proper notion of it is inconsistent with *Government* and that which lyes in the enjoyments of our *Rights and Properties*, is so far from

*Dio Rom.
hist. l. 54.*

L. 44. l. 11.

being inconsistent with *Monarchy*, that they are more advanced by that, than by any other way of Government.

2. Another principle which tends to the subverting Government under a pretence of *Liberty*, is, that in case of *Usurpation* upon the *Rights* of the *People*, they may resume the exercise of *Power*, and punish the *Supreme Magistrate* himself, if he be guilty of it: Then which there can be no principle imagined more destructive to civil *Societies*, and repugnant to the very nature of *Government*: For it destroys all the obligations of *Oaths* and *Compacts*; it makes the solemnest bonds of obedience signify nothing, when the people shall think fit to declare it: it makes every prosperous *Rebellion* just; for no doubt when the power is in the *Rebels* hands, they will justify themselves, and condemn their *Sovereign*. (And if *Corah*, *Dathan* and *Abiram* had succeeded in their *Rebellion* against *Moses*, no doubt they would have been called the *Keepers* of the *Liberties* of *Israel*.) It makes all Government dangerous to the persons in whom it is, considering the unavoidable infirmities of it, and the readiness of people to misconstrue the actions of their *Princes*, and their incapacity to judge of them, it not being fit that the reasons of all counsels of
Princes

Princes should be divulged by *Proclamations*. So that there can be nothing wanting to make *Princes* miserable, but that the people want *Power* to make them so. And the supposition of this principle will unavoidably keep up a constant jealousy between the *Prince* and his people: for if he knows their minds, he will think it reasonable to secure himself by all means against their *Power*, and endeavour to keep them as unable to resist as may be: whereby all mutual confidence between a *Prince* and his *People* will be destroyed: and there can be no such way to bring in an arbitrary *Government* into a *Nation*, as that which such men pretend, to be the only means to keep it out. Besides, this must necessarily engage a *Nation* in endless disputes about the forfeiture of *Power* into whose hands it falls: whether into the people in common, or some persons particularly chosen by the people for that purpose: for in an established *Government* according to their principles, the King himself is the true representative of the people; others may be chosen for some particular purposes, as proposing *Laws*, &c. but these cannot pretend by virtue of that choice, to have the full power of the people; and withall, whatever they do against the

consent of the people is unlawful; and their power is forfeited by attempting it.

But on the other side, what mighty danger can there be in supposing the persons of *Princes* to be so sacred, that no sons of violence ought to come near to hurt them? Have not all the ancient *Kingdoms* and *Empires* of the world flourished under the supposition of an unaccountable power in *Princes*? That hath been thought by those who did not own a derivation of their power from God, but a just security to their persons, considering the hazards, and the care of Government which they undergo? Have not the people who have been most jealous of their *Liberties*, been fain to have recourse to an unaccountable power, as their last refuge in case of their greatest necessities? I mean the *Romans* in their *Dictators*. And if it were thought not only reasonable, but necessary then, ought it not to be preserved inviolable, where the same *Laws* do give it by which men have any right to challenge any power at all? Neither doth this give *Princes* the liberty to do what they list; for the *Laws* by which they Govern, do fence in the rights and properties of men; and *Princes* do find so great conveniency ease and security in their Government by Law, that the sense of that will
keep

keep them far better within the compass of *Laws*, than the *Peoples* holding a Rod over them, which the best *Princes* are like to suffer the most by, and bad will but grow desperate by it. Good *Princes* will never need such a curb, because their oaths and promises, their love and tenderness towards their people, the sense they have of a *Power* infinitely greater than theirs, to which they must give an account of all their actions, will make them govern as the *Fathers* of their Countrey; and bad *Princes* will never value it, but will endeavour by all possible means to secure themselves against it. So that no inconveniency can be possibly so great on the supposition of this unaccountable *Power* in Sovereign *Princes*, taking it in the general, and meerly on the account of reason, as the unavoidable mischiefs of that *Hypothesis*, which places all power originally in the people, and notwithstanding all oaths and bonds whatsoever to obedience gives them the liberty to resume it when they please: which will alwaies be when that *Spirit* of *Faction* and *Sedition* shall prevail among them, which ruled here in *Corah* and his company.

2. Another pretence for this Rebellion of *Corah*, was, the freeing themselves from the encroach-

encroachments upon their spiritual priviledges which were made by the usurpations of Aaron and the Priesthood. This served for a very popular pretence, for they knew no reason that one *Tribe* should engross so much of the wealth of the Nation to themselves, and have nothing to do but to attend the service of God for it. What, say they, *are not all the Lords people holy?* Why may not then all they offer up incense to the Lord, as well as the Sons of Aaron? How many publick uses might those *Revenues* serve for, which are now to maintain Aaron, and all the sons of Levi? But if there must be some to attend the service of God, why may not the meanest of the people serve for that purpose, those who can be serviceable for nothing else? Why must there be an order of *Priesthood* distinct from that of *Levites*? why a *High-Priest* above all the *Priests*? what is there in all their office which one of the common people may not do as well as they? cannot they slay the sacrifices, and offer incense, and do all other parts of the *Priestly office*? So that at last they make all this to be a Politick design of Moses only to advance his own Family by making his Brother *High-Priest*, and to have all the *Priests* and *Levites* at his devotion, to keep the people the

the better in awe. This hath alwaies been the quarrel at *Religion*, by those who seldom pretend to it, but with a design to destroy it. For who would ever have minded the constant attendance at the *Temple*, if no encouragements had been given to those who were imployed in it? Or is not *Religion* apt enough to be despised of it self, by men of prophane minds, unless it be rendred more *mean* and *contemptible* by the *Poverty* of those, who are devoted to it? Shall not *God* be allowed the priviledge of every *Master* of a *Family*, to appoint the ranks and orders of his own servants, and to take care they be provided for, as becomes those who wait upon him? What a dishonour had this been to the *true God*, when those who worshipped *false Gods* thought nothing too great for those who were imployed in the service of them? But never any yet cryed, but he that had a mind to betray his *Master*, to what purpose is all this waste? Let *God* be honoured as he ought to be, let *Religion* come in for its share among all the things which deserve encouragement, and those who are imployed in the offices of it, enjoy but what *God*, and *Reason*, and the *Laws* of their *Countrey* give them, and then we shall see it was nothing, but the *discontent* and *faction* of *Corah* and his

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company

company which made any encroachment of *Aaron* and the *Priesthood* any pretence for Rebellion.

But all these pretences would not serve to make them escape the severe hand of divine *justice*; for in an extraordinary and remarkable manner he made them suffer the just desert of their sin, for *they perished in their contradiction*, which is the next thing to be considered, *viz.*

2. *The Judgement* which was inflicted upon them for it. They had provoked *Heaven* by their sin, and disturbed the *earth* by their Faction; and the *earth*, as if it were moved with indignation against them, trembled and *shook*, as *Josephus* saith, like waves that are tossed with a mighty wind, and then with a horrid noise it rends asunder, and opens its mouth to swallow those in its bowels who were unfit to live upon the face of it. They had been dividing the people, and the earth to their amazement and ruine divides it self under their feet, as though it had been designed on purpose, that in their punishment themselves might feel, and others see the mischief of their sin. Their seditious principles seemed to have infected the ground they stood upon; the earth of a sudden proves as unquiet and troublesome

some as they ; but to rebuke their madness, it was only in obedience to him who made it the executioner of his wrath against them; and when it had done its office, it is said, *that the earth closed upon them ; and they perished from among the Congregation.* Thus the earth having revenged it self against the disturbers of its peace, *Heaven* presently appears with a *flaming fire*, taking vengeance upon the 250 men, who in opposition to *Aaron*, had usurped the *Priestly office*, in offering incense before the Lord. Such a *Fire*, if we believe the same Historian, which far outwent the most dreadful eruptions of *Ætna* or *Vesuvius*, which neither the art of man, nor the power of the wind could raise, which neither the burning of Woods nor Cities could parallel ; but such a *Fire* which the wrath of *God* alone could kindle, whose light could be outdone by nothing but the heat of it. Thus Heaven and Earth agree in the punishment of such disturbers of *Government*, and *God* by this remarkable judgement upon them hath left it upon record to all ages, that all the world may be convinced how displeasing to him the sin of faction and sedition is. For *God* takes all this that was done against *Moses* and *Aaron*, as done against himself. For they are said to be gathered together against the Lord, v. 11. to

Numb. 16.

33.

V. 33.

Num. 26. 9. *provoke the Lord, v. 30. And the fire is said to come out from the Lord : v. 35. And afterwards it is said of them ; This is that Dathan and Abiram, who strove against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Corah, when they strove against the Lord.* By which we see God interprets striving against the Authority appointed by him, to be a striving against himself. God looks upon himself as immediately concerned in the Government of the world ; for by him *Princes reign*, and they are his *Vicegerents* upon earth ; and they who *resist*, resist not a meer appointment of the people, but an *Ordinance of God* ; and they who do so shall in the mildest sense receive a *severe punishment* from him. Let the pretences be never so popular, the persons never so great and famous ; nay, though they were of the great Council of the *Nation*, yet we see God doth not abate of his severity upon any of these considerations.

Rom. 13. 1, 2:

This was the first formed sedition that we read of against *Moses*, the people had been murmuring before, but they wanted heads to manage them. Now all things concur to a most dangerous Rebellion upon the most popular pretences of *Religion* and *Liberty* ; and now God takes the first opportunity of declaring his hatred of such actions ; *that others might hear, and fear, and do no more so presumptuously.*

sumptuously. This hath been the usual method of divine Judgements ; the first of the kind hath been most remarkably punished in this life, that by it they may see how hateful such things are to *God* ; but if men will venture upon them notwithstanding, *God* doth not alwaies punish them so much in this world, (though he sometimes doth) but reserves them, without repentance, to his Justice in the world to come. The first man that sinned was made an example of *Gods* Justice ; The first world ; the first publick attempt against Heaven at *Babel* after the plantation of the world again ; the first Cities which were so generally corrupted after the flood ; the first breaker of the *Sabbath* after the *Law* ; the first offerers with strange fire ; the first lookers into the *Ark*, and here the first popular Rebellion and Usurpers of the office of *Priesthood*. *God* doth hereby intend to preserve the honour of his *Laws* ; he gives men warning enough by one exemplary punishment, and if notwithstanding that, they will commit the same sin, they may thank themselves if they suffer for it, if not in this life, yet in that to come. And that good effect this Judgement had upon that people, that although the next day 14000 suffered for murmuring at the destruction of these men, yet we do not find that

any Rebellion was raised among them afterwards upon these popular pretences of Religion, and the Power of the People. While their Judges continued (who were Kings, without the state and title of Kings) they were observed with reverence, and obeyed with diligence. When afterwards they desired a King, with all the Pomp and Grandeur which other Nations had (which Samuel acquaints them with, *viz. the Officers and Soldiers, the large Revenues he must have*) though their King was disowned by God, yet the people held firm in their obedience to him, and David himself, though anointed to be King, persecuted by Saul, and though he might have pleaded Necessity and Providence as much as any ever could, (when Saul was strangely delivered into his hands,) yet we see what an opinion he had of the person of a bad King, *The Lord forbid that I should do this thing against my Master the Lords Anointed, to stretch forth my hand against him, seeing he is the Anointed of the Lord.* And lest we should think it was only his Modesty or his Policy which kept him from doing it, he afterwards, upon a like occasion declares, it was only the sin of doing it, which kept him from it. *For who can stretch forth his hand against the Lords Anointed and be guiltless?* Not

1 Sam. 8.

1.

1 Sam. 24.

6.

1 Sam. 26.

2.

Not as though *David* could not do it without the power of the *Sanhedrin*, as it hath been pretended by the Sons of *Corah* in our age; for he excepts none; he never seizes upon him to carry him prisoner to be tryed by the *Sanhedrin*, nor is there any foundation for any such power in the *Sanhedrin* over the persons of their *Sovereigns*. It neither being contained in the grounds of its institution, nor any precedent occurring in the whole story of the Bible, which gives the least countenance to it: Nay, several passages of *Scripture* utterly overthrow it, for how could *Solomon* have said, *Where the word of a King is, there is power; and who may say unto him, what dost thou?* If by the constitution of their Government, the *Sanhedrin* might have controlled him in what he said or did. But have not several of the modern *Jews* said so? Granting that some have; yet so they have spoken many unreasonable and foolish things besides; but yet none of these have said, that it was in the power of the *Sanhedrin* to depose their *Kings*, or put them to death; all that they say is, that in the cases expressed by the *Law*, if the *Kings* do transgress, the *Sanhedrin* had the power of inflicting the penalty of *scourging*, which yet they deny to have had any *infamy* in it among,

among them. But did not *David* transgress the *Law* in his murder and adultery? did not *Solomon* in the multitude of his wives & *Idolatry*, yet where do we read that the *Sanhedrin* ever took cognisance of these things? And the more ancient *Jews* do say, that the King was not to be judged, as is plain in the Text of the *Misna*, however the Expositors have taken a liberty to contradict it; but as far as we can find, without any foundation of reason: and R. *Jeremiah* in *Nachmanides*, saith expressly, That no creature may judge the King, but the holy and blessed God alone. But we have an Authority far greater than his, viz. of *David*s in this case, who after he hath denied that any man can stretch forth his hand against the Lords Anointed, and be guiltless: In the very next words he submits the judgement of him only to God himself, saying, As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall descend into battel and perish. He thought it sufficient to leave the judgement of those things to God, whose power over Princes he knew was enough, if well considered by them, to keep them in awe. We have now dispatched the first consideration of the words of the Text, as they relate to the fact of *Corah* and his company.

2. We ought now to enquire, whether the

Mt. Sanch.
C. 2.

Nachm. 1. 14
Deut. 1. 196.

1 Sam. 26.
10.

the *Christian Doctrine* hath made any alteration in these things ; or whether that gives any greater encouragement to faction and sedition than the *Law* did, when it is masked under a pretence of zeal for *Religion* and *Liberty*. But it is so far from it, that what *God* then declared to be displeasing to him by such remarkable judgements, hath been now more fully manifested by frequent precepts, and vehement exhortations, by the most weighty arguments, and the constant practice of the first and the best of Christians, and by the black character which is set upon those who under a pretence of *Christian Liberty* did despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities, and follow *Corah* in his Rebellion, however they may please themselves with greater light, than former ages had in this matter, they are said to be such for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. It would take up too much time to examine the frivolous evasions, and ridiculous distinctions by which they would make the case of the *Primitive Christians* in not resisting Authority, so much different from theirs who have not only done it, but in spight of *Christianity* have pleaded for it. Either they said they wanted strength, or courage, or the countenance of the Senate, or did not under-

Jude v. 13.

stand their own *Liberty*; when all their obedience was only due to those precepts of the *Gospel*, which make it so great a part of *Christianity to be subject to Principalities and Powers*, and which the Teachers of the *Gospel* had particularly given them in charge to put the people in mind of.

Tit. 3. 1.

And happy had it been for us if this Doctrine had been more sincerely preached, and duly practised in this Nation; for we should then never have seen those sad times, which we can now no otherwise think of, than of the devouring *Fire*, and raging *Pestilence*, i. e. of such dreadful judgements which we have smarted so much by, that we heartily pray we may never feel them again: For then *fears and jealousies* began our miseries, and the *curse* so often denounced against *Meroz*, fell upon the whole Nation: When the Sons of *Corah* managed their own ambitious designs against *Moses* and *Aaron* (the King and the Church) under the same pretences of *Religion* and *Liberty*. And when the pretence of *Religion* was broken into *Schisms*, and *Liberty* into oppression of the people, it pleased God out of his secret and unsearchable judgements to suffer the Sons of Violence to prevail against the Lords Anointed; and then

then they would know no difference between his being conquered and guilty. They could find no way to justify their former wickedness, but by adding more: The consciousness of their own guilt, and the fears of the punishment due to it, made them unquiet and thoughtfull; as long as his life and presence did upbraid them with the one, and made them fearfull of the other. And when they found the greatness and constancy of his mind, the firmness of his Piety, the zeal he had for the true interest of the people, would not suffer him to betray his *Trust* for the saving of his life; they charge him with their own guilt, and make him suffer because they had deserved to do it. And as if it had not been enough to have abused the names of *Religion* and *Liberty* before, they resolve to make the very name of *Justice* to suffer together with their *King*: by calling that infamous company who condemned their *Sovereign*, *A High Court of Justice* which trampled under foot the *Laws* both of God and men. But lest the world should imagine they had any shame left in their sins, they make the people witnesses of his *Murder*; and pretend the *Power* of the *People* for doing that, which they did detest and abhor. Thus fell our *Royal Martyr* a

sacrifice to the fury of unreasonable men; who either were so blind as not to see his worth, or rather so bad as to hate him for it. And as God gave once to the people of the Jews a King in his Anger, being provoked to it by their sins, we have cause to say, that upon the same account he took away one of the best of Kings from us in his wrath. But blessed be that God, who in the midst of judgement was pleased to remember mercy, in the miraculous preservation, and glorious restauration of our Gracious Sovereign; let us have a care then of abusing the mercies of so great a deliverance to quite other ends than God intended it for, lest he be provoked to say to us, as he did of old to the Jews, *But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your King.* And if we look on this as a dreadful judgement, let us endeavour to prevent it by a timely and sincere reformation of our lives, and by our hearty supplications to God that he would preserve the person of our Sovereign from all the attempts of violence, that he would so direct his counsels, and prosper his affairs, that His Government may be a long and publick Blessing to these Nations.

1 Sam. 12.
25.

FINIS.

